Community Culture and the Environment:
A Guide to Understanding a Sense of Place

Understanding community social systems can be key to successful environmental protection outreach and education. The *Community Culture and the Environment: A Guide to Understanding a Sense of Place* is a flexible toolbox for understanding the social dynamics involved in community-based efforts. Users will learn about such things as local knowledge about community issues, the language community members use, influential subgroups within the community, historical trends in the community, environmental and other community priorities, and other social factors. This information is crucial in developing sustainable strategies for community participation and planning regarding environmental protection.

The *Community Culture and the Environment Guide* outlines a flexible, step-by-step process for building a picture of community cultural preferences and priorities by identifying local values, beliefs and behaviors as they relate to community life and the surrounding natural environment. It introduces the concepts of "community" and "culture", and the *Guide's* social science premise. It presents reasons for conducting a community cultural assessment, steps on how to proceed in an assessment project, community characteristics to investigate, methods for learning more about community values and for building partnerships, and ways to use the results from your assessment. It also includes easy-to-use worksheets and community assessment stories from around the country.

The *Community Culture and the Environment Training* is a dynamic and interactive approach to understanding and working with community processes. Modules are designed to assist participants in thinking "outside-of-the-box" on community issues, and teaches participants how to use different methods and other elements of the *Guide*. All modules use real-time experiences which give the participants an opportunity to explore their own sense of place and/or to analyze a situation with which they are dealing. Depending on interest and need, the training can be specifically designed as a half-day introduction to the *Guide* or as a 1- to 2-day workshop.

The **audience** for the *Guide* and the training includes people, organizations, and institutions involved in watershed protection (community and watershed-based organizations, universities, etc.) and public health professionals as well as federal, tribal, state and local agencies seeking technical skills for improving stakeholder involvement processes.

In particular, **watershed groups will benefit from the *Guide* and training.** For instance, the skills taught by the *Guide* could be used to 1) identify a communities vision and goals, 2) engage volunteers and other stakeholders, 3) enhance education and outreach efforts, and 4) build new and strengthen existing partnerships.
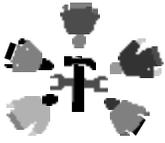
Using the *Guide*'s Tool Kit:
Key Steps in Conducting a Community Cultural Assessment

Steps ❶ - ❷

The *Guide* offers recommendations and worksheets on planning for an assessment project and for defining goals and characterizing the community(s) with which you will work.

Step ❸

Community Characteristics and Questions stimulate thought about the type of information to gather. And, corresponding charts indicate which tools and methods are best for understanding each characteristic.

COMMUNITY CHARACTERISTICS AND QUESTIONS:

- community boundaries
- community capacity and activism
- community interaction and information flow
- demographic information
- economic conditions and employment
- education
- environmental awareness and values
- governance

- infrastructure and public services
- local identity
- local leisure and recreation
- natural resources and landscape
- property ownership, management and planning
- public safety and health
- religious and spiritual practices

Step ❹

Assessment Methods provide detailed directions on how to use different methods and tools for understanding a community, and includes publication references and web sites for more information. Appendix B includes information about quantitative and qualitative research to help you understand these methods better.

ASSESSMENT METHODS:

- census data research
- content analysis
- environmental values typology
- focus groups
- interviewing
- library data research
- maps and geographic research

- meetings
- observation
- regional economic data research
- social mapping: asset, cognitive, concept, social network
- surveys and polls
- visual methods

Step ❺

Analyzing Results includes how to store, organize, analyze, summarize and present your results. This Step is complementary to Appendix B and both should be read before starting an assessment project.

Step ❻

Results may be used in a variety of ways. A discussion of the following are included in Chapter 3 of the *Guide*.   Appendix A includes community stories that reflect the ideas in the *Guide*.

USE OF RESULTS:

- community definition
- community targeting/stakeholder identification
- cross-cultural communication
- partnerships: coalition/consensus building
- environmental education and outreach
- environmental planning
- public participation

- community service projects/volunteers
- resource identification
- sustainable economic development strategies
- goal setting and visioning
- comprehensive planning
- information gaps
- indicators